

By the Sea

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1892

Fred Henderson

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BY THE SEA



BY THE SEA

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

FRED HENDERSON

v l v

SECOND EDITION, WITH ADDITIONAL POEMS

London

T. FISHER UNWIN

PATERNOSTER SQUARE

MDCCCXCII

PR 4782

H5 B9

1872

I Dedicate

THESE POEMS TO MY FRIEND,

FREDERIC CHARLES,

WHO IS NOW UNDERGOING TEN YEARS' PENAL SERVITUDE
FOR HIS ALLEGED PART IN WHAT IS KNOWN
AS THE WALSALL ANARCHIST
CONSPIRACY.

[I dare scarcely trust myself to speak here as I fain would of my friend. It has been my good fortune to know many true and noble men, but none more true, none nobler, than Charles. The soul of honour, generous to the extreme of inflicting privation upon himself for the sake of others, possessed of integrity that never considered the expediency of the thing he believed right, I do not think that in all the world there is another to be matched with him. He never did a mean thing, never uttered an ungenerous word. I am glad to have lived, were it but to have known him ; and, in the hour of his terrible trial, I must bear my tribute to the comrade who has honoured me with his friendship, and whom to see and welcome to the light again is one of the things that make the future bright for me. For I know that the stain of criminality was never more unjustly fixed upon a pure and noble character ; and that the association of his name with any act of dishonour is as foul an outrage upon the truth as was ever conceived. With a love and respect born of intimate acquaintance, I am proud to honour my book by inscribing his name upon its first page.]

PREFATORY NOTE.



“THIS OUR BROTHER” and two or three of the sonnets in the first part, and all the second part of this book, did not appear in the first edition. The rest, with here and there some trifling change, stands as before.

I cannot pass this opportunity without expressing my happiness and surprise at finding myself in a second edition within so brief a time. The surprise is due, not to any want of confidence in what I have written, keenly as my own private criticism has often thrust at me, but to the discovery that I was wrong in thinking (as I did when the first edition was issued) that the poet whose themes are such as the passion of my life has set for my singing would have to rest content with the praise of his own conscience alone. To my great joy that has not been so; and these poems, to whose theme of hope for the future of the world's poor and oppressed I have given not only my song but the daily work of my life, have received a welcome far beyond expectation. Living and working in London, face to face with and sharing in her infinite sin and her infinite suffering, and feeling

borne in upon me as strongly as a man can feel the need for solving the terrible problem, I have tortured no unwilling dross of words into shape, but have spoken as my life makes me. And for reward I have the glory of

Knowing that Time, beyond the years you see,
Has wrought the dreams that count to you for madness
Into the substance of the life to be.

BY THE SEA.

I AM treading old scenes to-day that the feet of my
boyhood trod
When the world was fair with hope, and the lovely
blossoming sod
Burst into flower as sweet as the large delight that
filled
Days by knowledge undarkened, and pulses by fear un-
stilled ;
Days when the sun shone clear as the far years promised
to be,
And pulses that beat untamed as the beat of the tame-
less sea.
Here in the wonderful dawn of the life-spring days that
can bear
No burden of passion save pleasure, nor dream of the
dark of despair,
Over the swarded downs by the cliff-built edge of the tide
I wandered on wings of free fancy, I with delight by my
side.
When the glad sun rose on the waters, and the moon
grew old and grey,

And the spirit in every wave was dancing with joy for
the day
Till the wide sea quivered and shook with the touch of
their glittering feet,
'Twas for me that the light was made golden, the breath
of the morning made sweet.
And Delight took me up in his arms, and out over the
sea we sped,
And shared in the joy of the waves and the skies that
laughed overhead.
I drank at the fountain of life, and of bitterness tasted
none,
And my heart glowed warm with the draught as with
wine long hid from the sun,
As prone on the poppied ledges that flamed down the
cliff I lay,
Watching out over the waters the gleam of the seamews
at play.
When the flame-crowned, jubilant noon drew rein in the
high mid-air,
Like a spirit unclothed of its clay I soared to his car, and
there,
Bathed round with the glow of his light, with the plumes
of his soft breeze fanned,
My soul like a lark's song floated over the sea and land.
A throng of the kindest spirits in all sweet shapes Life
sent
To weave for my wearing a garland of pleasure and
beauty blent :
The sweetest-voiced amongst them took form as of birds
and sang,

And the down's wide spaces all day with their wonderful
 voices rang ;
A myriad others were flowers, and over the brightened
 earth
Shed the silent music of colour and danced with the
 breeze in mirth,
Their odorous breath was caught up in a kiss by the
 eager air,
And the light winds loved to waft it like benison every-
 where ;
While some that had been their lovers ere thus for my
 joy they were fain
Fluttered on butterfly wings to feed from their lips again.

Oh land of the dawn, from whose prospect life lay
 through a vision of flowers,
And sweet still places of shade for rest in the noon's hot
 hours !
Whether the day should fail and the night come over at
 last,
Who dreams while the day is fresh as far as the eye can
 cast ?
For the murmur of whelming years jarred not on thy
 dawning dream,
As the sound of its fated sea is not heard at the fount of
 a stream ;
Though the sea-swallowed river grows dark when the
 great tides over it ring,
Yet bodeless of fear was the joy that laughed in the
 gleam of its spring.
Oh magical days far off, ere I and the world grew old,

Though the after years may bring gifts of wisdom and
power and gold,
Yet wisdom begetteth sorrow as the shadow is born of
the sun,
And power is a lonely dwelling, and with gold is the
heart undone,
They are painted to look like fire, but the shivering
hearts of men
The lost glad warmth of delight from these shall revive
not again ;
And none of them, nay, though the world were to open
its store of them all,
Can weigh with a glowing moment of the days passed out
of recall.

As a wave with the winds behind o'er the face of the
deep is blown
The heart of a boy is driven with desire for the things
unknown ;
And the hills that bounded the vision of flower-strewn
downs by the sea
Grew into a prisoning bulwark that severed the world
from me.
For the voices of men across them were borne on the
winds of May,
And a whisper of life stole to me from where the great
cities lay ;
Life intense and in earnest and throbbing with passionate
deeds,
The surge of a myriad men swayed whither the strong
fate leads.

There was the goal of desire, where the hurrying life tide
 whirled,
And the pulse of great aspirations beat fast in the veins
 of the world.
As a lark in the silver dusk when dawn steals over the
 night,
My soul spread wings at the call, and over the hills took
 flight
Straight to the hoped-for day, with a song of life in its
 heart,
And panting with ardour of joy among men to bear its
 part.

Alas for the high hope fallen, the song turned into a
 wail,
The world that promise had built, and the promise that
 proof made fail,
The false dawn seen from a distance that, seen by the
 lured anear,
Was only a balefire kindled the souls of the lured to
 sear,
A wrecker's beacon aflame on the edge of a deadly shore
Where blood is mixed with the foam and shrieks with
 the breakers' roar.
Was this the goal of desire, the passionate life I sought,
Life intense and in earnest, with splendid deeds en-
 wrought ?
For a mummer's mask of custom hid each man's soul
 from sight,
As the quenchless stars are hidden when cloud broods
 over the night ;

And the shifting lies of fashion, as the wandering lights
of a fen,
In the maze of the city peopled with mockeries of men
Flickered before the eyes, and lured the erring feet
To death in the sinking quagmire of poisonous deceit.
And I cried aloud for a glimpse, were it but for a
moment's space,
Of one man's soul in the crowd, one vision of Truth's fair
face,
One brave in his own real self who would tear the mask
from his brow,
Among the hypocrite shapes that down to a throned lie
bow.
But the answerless crowd hurried on, and the silence
that followed my cry
Was as Fate's frozen hand laid cold on the heart of a
man who must die.
Then out of the thick of the throng one clad as with
darkness came,
Whose eyes—dead, lustreless eyes—were as ashes that
once had been flame,
His face as the face of winter, frost-bound and hard as a
stone,
Nor passion nor pain was there, nor sign of laughter or
moan,
But bitter sorrow grown sullen for lack of a hope to
bear,
And I knew that I stood at gaze on the devil's face of
Despair.
Men shrieked for a moment and fell in the dust at his
feet as he passed,

And his shadow over them prone like the gloom of
eclipse was cast ;
And mine own knees trembled and shook, and my soul
grew dizzy with dread,
But hope dies hard in a man, and I turned from the
terror and fled ;
Fled as a frightened bird, half-waked by the roaring of fire,
When the forest crackles and flames, and the peril of
death sweeps nigher ;
Fled down the maze of the city, as a ship sets sail to the
wind
And heads for mid-sea from a death in the rock-riven
breakers behind.

As a sleeper falling headlong through the dusk of a
ghastly dream
Sees all the night about him with phantom faces teem,
And a horror of darkness hovers on black wings over his
flight,
Dizzily down through the haunted and fathomless spaces
of night ;
So through the cloven throng on the wings of swift fear
I passed,
Wrapped in the cloud of his presence who followed
behind me fast,
Seeking my soul a shelter, some rock-based dwelling of
Right,
'Mid the shards of Hope's universe breaking in wreck
down the yawn of night.
And over my shoulder to right and to left, as on we
went,

His finger pointed ever, like a stroke of the white moon
sent,
A single splinter of light, through the cleft of a sullen
cloud,
Piercing the heart of the dusk : and in all the phantom
crowd
Of men that toiled and hurried and shrieked around our
way,
Mine eyes in the trace of his lightning read the doom of
their own dismay.
For wherever I turned for the solace that Hope still
whispered was there,
His finger arrowed the darkness and flashed on the lie
laid bare.
And ever as fury grew and my swift soul doubled and
turned,
His pointings over the night like a web of quick light-
nings burned ;
The maze of a gleaming sword whirled fast as the flicker
of wings,
Cleaving the depths asunder to the innermost heart of
things :
Till the vision revealed lay clear to the furthest edge of
the world,
Like a scroll writ large with knowledge 'neath a scholar's
eye unfurled.

I saw in the midst thereof a throne built all of gold,
Whose wingèd beams were rayed out the sphere of all
lands to unfold ;
And prone in the dust around it I saw the nations fall,

And he that bore the sceptre was Mammon, the lord of
all.

Over against the throne a smoking altar stood,
Whereon men offered the gifts that their god's desire
deemed good.

Honour they brought, and Truth, and flung them bound
in the flame ;

And captive Beauty they led to his feet that he might
defame,

And the grim god laughed as he seized her and smote
the life from her eyes,

As a wild storm laughs in thunder when the sea strews
death for its prize.

And Love with her sweet face veiled they bound in the
fettters of law,

Fierce was the triumph that burned in Mammon's eyes
as he saw

Her limbs in the flame, and he leaned out over her, dark,
like a pall,

Breathing the smoke of her death as the sweetest incense
of all.

And he thrust his hands in her ashes, and scattered them
over the crowd

That round about his feet did homage ceaseless and loud,
And they whom the dead Love touched went straight to
the altar pyre,

And laid their living hearts in the fierce consuming fire :
And when they returned towards him, each passionless
bosom dead,

Hard hearts of gold he gave them to wear in their breasts
instead ;

Bidding them range the world, and reap the reward of
their deed
In blood and bitter hatreds, in self-contempt and greed ;
To offer lust in the market and barter kisses for gain,
And babble an hired priest's blessing on the lie that love
would disdain,
To yoke the poor to their car, 'neath the sting of the
hunger lash,
Till over their own young children the swift wheels
hurry and flash ;
To trample with bloody feet in the wake of murderous
war,
With the commerce cry of " Plunder " heard loud in the
battle's roar.

Then the vision faded and passed, and my soul was
sick with dread,
And I deemed it were better far to make flight for the
land of the dead,
Where all men surely have sleep with never a dream of
pain,
Than to face a world where the devil had set up Mammon
to reign.
I to bow down before him, to barter Love for lust,
And deem the price of honour a handful of golden dust !
To have in mine ears for ever the children's cry for
bread,
And see my hands with the blood of my murdered
fellows made red !
Better the lute-strings broken, and hushed their quiver-
ing strife,

Than to wail such nameless discord at the touch of
maddened life.
For who with his blood yet wholesome, and his heart
untouched by decay,
Would set to his lips the poison of life in an evil day,
And watch the subtle contagion steal into his helpless
breast,
Till the one sound fruit in the box is rotten as all the
rest ?
Unless a man might arise in the strength that the right
can give,
Who would set his face as steel to the evils that round
him live,
And would bear such a part in the midst of the cancered
growths of the earth
That his health might ray through them all like the
pulse of a glad new birth ;
New glow of forgotten hopes and glorious loves long
dead
That should quicken again as flowers with the spring's
breath over them shed !
And sudden the thought of life seemed sweet as a martyr's
dream :
I was glad that my day was still young in the light of its
morning beam,
With the long hours waiting ahead to be filled with work
for the best,—
When the shadows grew long to eastward would be time
to think of rest.
I would stand in the front of his throne and bid the lie to
come down,

Teach men to restore to the brows of Truth the usurpèd
crown,
As a wind in the clouds of the dawn I would rend and
scatter the veil
That under its curtained blackness made the light of the
sun to fail !
And my hope that had well-near died took brighter shape
than of old,
And the gaunt Despair at my side was gone as my vow
was told.

* * * * *

I am treading old scenes to-day, but not as I trod be-
fore ;
The poppies are dashed with blood, and the moan of the
long grey shore
Is the voice of a myriad men in half-articulate prayer,
Surging across the years with a sorrow they scarce can
bear.
Oh days of the long strife waged, ye will bear me witness
now
How the strong desire has yearned toward the deeds of
its early vow,
Over the roar of the buffeting tides clashed loud in mine
ears,
Hearing the hidden trumpets, the voice of the coming
years,
The surety of golden days when the clamour of wrong
shall cease,
And the smile of love's own harvest shall ripple o'er fields
of peace !

For I know that his throne is shaken and the end is nigh
at hand ;
Hearest thou not the whisper that steals up over the land,
The whisper of winds upgathered and poised in the hand
of fate,
With swift plumes lifted and ready ?—Ay, surely the night
grows late.

Up where the grass of the cliff leans over above the
flood
A grey church tower in ruins stands lone in the solitude ;
The wild birds sing above it, and the ivy clings around,
And under its poppies its old-time worshippers sleep
sound ;
And the mounded field of death is rent on the seaward
side,
For the loose cliff breaks at each storm and crumbles into
the tide,
And half of the dead have gone down, and the waves have
tossed them deep
Far out to the dim sea caves, a glimmering world of
sleep ;
And the lonely tower with its dead but waits for the storm
to rise
That shall bear its shame for ever from the sight of newer
eyes ;
Relic of days forgotten, dead form of a dying faith,
Haunting the light of the present, a vanished Past's dim
wraith !
All night the long foam whitens and reaches over the
sand,

And murmurs of doom to come in the ear of the lonely
land ;
And the winds wail up from seaward, and sigh in the long
grave grass
A message of weltering tides, and of things that were and
must pass ;
Of the lifeless forms of custom, grey ghosts of faiths
outworn,
And dead hearts under their shadow for whom no day is
born ;
Of gods that have gone their way to the darkness under
the tide,
And those that here for a little to vex the earth abide ;
Of a world forsaken of truth, alone with the hollow night,
Sleeping its desolate sleep till the storm is loosed in its
might
And the thunderous surge breaks in, and the fanes of a
worshipped lie
Go down to the whelming death that all hypocrite things
must die.

A SONG FOR TO-DAY.

WHO will sing us the song of to-day ?

The lance is broken and knights are dead ;
Their sun went down over France blood-red,
And the last of them all was long since clay ;
Sung and resung, let them rest at last
With fame full writ in their own dead past :
Come—who will sing us the song of to-day ?

Lovers and loved we have for aye,
And the song of their joy is ever sweet,
But here where the night and the morning meet,
Here where the light and the dark hold fray,
And great hopes shadow themselves in dawn,
Crash grander chords than can e'er be drawn
From the simple lute of the loves at play.

The sweet soft song and the easeful lay,
That soothe like the murmur of summer streams,
Will well attune to the time of dreams
When the world has leisure in dreams to stray ;
When its ear is live to the happy call
Of the new love warm in the hearts of all,
And "Slaves !" no man unto men can say.

Come, raise we here this song of to-day :
Tell of keen war with the devil's throngs
Of Envy and Hate and the myriad wrongs
That blacken the earth with their dense array ;
Tell of the cause of the poor who sink,
Crushed grapes in the press, while the rich men drink
And barter the trodden wine, and pray.

Tell of the women and men grown gray
With lonely labour and scant delight,
Of tears that fall in the bitter night,
Of hopes that wane as the years decay
Till hearts are ashes that once were fire,
And the full-sailed vision of youth's desire
A sunken wreck ere the close of day.

Tell of the children that swarm and die
In loathsome dens where Despair is king,
The blackened buds of a frosty spring
That wither sunless. Remote they lie
From the love that should nurture each quickening
sense,
While Vice and Hunger and Pestilence,
Breast-poisoned nurses, the babes drain dry.

Tell of the sword that is sharp to slay,
Raise loud the note of unwearied strife ;
Beyond the tangle and toil waits Life,
And bids us hasten to her away.
Tell of the death that is Mammon's dower,
Of darkness dashed from its height of power
When out of the cloud-coil breaks the day.

Tell of the doom that shall smite away
The crown of gain from the spoiler's head,
From the cruel thief of the poor man's bread,
And the law that blesses the theft for pay ;
Of love set free from the curse of gold,
Of youth renewed for a world grown old
With kings and robbers and men of prey.

Of the joy of living, of Man made one,
Of growing knowledge through ages stored
Made free to all men, scattered abroad
Wide and free as the light of the sun ;
While the world's soul, loosened from night at last,
Sweeps, strong-winged, out of the woeful past
To the undreamed joy that shall yet be won.

“THIS OUR BROTHER.”

[“The South London coroner held an inquest yesterday on the body of John William Barrett, aged 66 years, a hawker, lately living at Wagner Street, Old Kent Road. Police-constable 74R stated that he was called about 2.30 last Wednesday afternoon, and found deceased lying on the bed (such as it was) quite dead. He searched the apartment, but could find no trace of food. Dr. J. W. Williams stated that he had made a post-mortem examination of the body, which was shockingly emaciated; there was no sign of any fat about it. The stomach and intestines were entirely empty, and deceased was literally starved to death. The jury returned a verdict in accordance with the medical evidence.”—*Report of a coroner's inquest in London in the year of our Lord, 1892.*]

WHATSOEVER joys may be
Hidden in futurity,
When the happy earth shall view
All her dreams of good come true,
This man never shall have share
Of the glory waiting there.
Time no backward debt can pay
From the exchequer of to-day,
Nor for empty Now can borrow
Credit from a full to-morrow ;

And, though night make briefest stay
Ere the rise of that new day
When forgotten Love shall come
To her long-deserted home
In the heart of all mankind,
This man, to the new light blind,
Through eternity shall bear
Only memories of despair ;
Nor shall aught Time holds in store
Cancel one brief pain he bore.

All the glory of the earth
Gathered about this man's birth ;
Knowledge, widening with the years,
Till men set their hopes and fears
Far beyond the narrow round
Where their old-time gods were bound ;
Science, daring to explore
Past a verge undreamed before,
Where upon the untravelled tide
Giant forces anchored ride,
Waiting until man shall take
Their strong helm and onward make
To the fuller days that hide
Where their mighty keels can guide ;
All that might have made delight
Was about him,—Day and Night,
And the changing of the year,
All the beauty earth holds dear
With its old profusion spread :

—In the midst the man lies dead
For the lack of daily bread.

Oh my brother, hearts that ache
For the world's great sorrow's sake,
Thus to see thee, almost deem
Man's whole life some devil's dream
Made incarnate, and our hope
Yet to see life's fullest scope
Possible to all mankind
But a devil's joke designed
For hell's laughter. Were 't not so
How could earth outlive thy woe,
Bearing with a shameless face
Such a burden of disgrace?
Were we what desire has willed
Since the first world-hunger filled
Prophet hearts of poets old
Longing for the years of gold;
Should the day that, ages long
Threading centuries with song,
Hope has visioned, really be
For yet unfolded years to see,
Sure thy grave across its way
Would bid the world make sudden stay
In its rapid race to hell,
And the same remorseful knell
That proclaims thy doom should tell
Of greed and enmity and hate,
Whose foul spells have wrought thy fate,

Buried with thee, ne'er again
To wring the tortured hearts of men.

Cowards we that do not dare
To read the message thou dost bear,
Nor with thy dread challenge cope.
Still we nurse the cheated hope
In the face of thy despair,
Dread accuser, lying there,
Mocking at our dreams of bliss
Ending all for thee in this.
In this charnel-house of life,
Resonant with endless strife,
Knowledge grows without a heart,
Power plays a tyrant's part,
Greed on tombs sits thronèd high
Where truth and honour confined lie :
Yet we dream the world is fair
Could we reach the outer air,
That beyond the gloomy gates
Barred with selfishness, there waits
Glorious Love arrayed in light
To greet us 'merging forth from night ;
Dream and dream, but make no stir
To win the welcome smile from her.
Shall there come a bridal day
When strong life shall break away
From the shame that binds it now,
And with honour-crownèd brow,
Take Love's hand and find at last
Solace for the dreadful past ?

Be Hope's answer what it may,
Thine is an eternal "Nay."
Since thy fate can move us not,
Surely though the whole world rot
With a cancerous growth of ill
We shall stand and bear it still,
Heedless, till the world shall cease,
Of the comradeship and peace
That the glad earth might have known
Had wisdom with its knowledge grown.

* * * * *

Might have known ! My God, not yet
Let us all our hope forget !
Though the world may heedless be,
There are some that weep for thee ;
And if but one heart can know
All our shame in this thy woe,
Let hell laugh, we still shall dare
To keep our souls above despair ;
Still shall see, beyond the night,
Spacious years of love and light
Widening to the perfect end
Of fellowship of friend with friend.

*THE WORKERS' SONG OF THE
SPRINGTIDE.*

WE have heard that the spring is lovely,
That the whole earth leaps with glee
When the young May brings to the woodlands
The rapture of being free ;
And we know when the springtide cometh,
Though we cannot see its grace,
For our prisoning walls grow closer
With the sun's glare in our face.

For us in the spring, not the singing
Of birds, but the whirring of wheels,
And the shrieking of noisy engines
Till our brain with the discord reels ;
And the stifling air of our work cells
Grows hotter and fiercer far,
Oh, curse we the sultry springtide
Where pests and hot fevers are.

We have heard of the happy forests
Where the leaves in the sunshine play,

And the merry flowers listen
To the song of the birds all day ;
But for us in our homes in Slumland
What beauty is there at all,
Where the very skies above us
Are black with the smoke's cursed pall ?

We know there are some with leisure
Who roam where the world is sweet,
But we to our factory prisons
Are chained by the hands and feet ;
For the cry of our babes is sounding
For ever into our ears,
And we toil for the bread to feed them,
With a toil that is full of fears.

We build the homes of our masters
Where in soft ease they dwell,
And the sound of music greets them
Midst the comfort they love so well ;
But we know that their ease is builded
On the hunger and pain we bear,
Their pleasure upon our toiling,
Their hope upon our despair.

They sing of the merry springtide
Which is sweet to them indeed,
These wealthy whom we are clothing,
Whose little ones we feed ;
But to us is the sun a furnace,
The spring but a scorching hell,

The sky but a burning cauldron,
And life but a prison cell.

But the time will come when the beauties
Of earth shall be for all,
When none on his brother's slavehood
Shall base his freedom from thrall,
When the spring shall come laden with gladness
And pleasure instead of pain
To us who have toiled and sorrowed
Nor tasted our toiling's gain.

LABOUR DAY.

{WRITTEN FOR THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR
DEMONSTRATIONS OF MAY DAY.}

WE, toilers of the field and town,
By long oppression trodden down,
In every clime beneath the sun
Have seen the new life to be won.

Seen that all the strife we waged
Was but fool with fool engaged ;
Where we erst as foemen stood,
Lo, to-day reigns brotherhood.

Seas and mountains 'tween us lie,
Our rulers teach that enmity
Should by nature be begat
'Tween us on this side, you on that.

We have cast that lie away,
Brothers, on this fair May day ;
Seas between us rise and fall,
Brotherhood can bridge them all.

Compass we the world to-day
With linkèd hands ; our crown of May,—
This human garland love has twined,—
About the brows of earth we bind.

Across the May time's flowering sward
The joyful earth goes summerward
To brighter days and skies more clear
And the full beauty of the year :

So world-wide is our march to-day
On from this quickening of May,
The winter of our strife is dead ;
Lo, the full summer lies ahead.

TO THE MUSE IN EXILE.

IN golden days when earth was young
The common speech was poet's dower,
And sweetly in the common tongue
Beauty proclaimed familiar power :

Then none of all our bards would dare
To set his faery sail o'er seas,
But first invoked in loving prayer
Thee, goddess, to direct the breeze.

But I, who in these days am fain
To voyage where they roamed before,
Have sped my prayer to thee in vain,
And languish on the cheerless shore.

For in the common ways of men
No trace survives : thou art not there :
Nor when we call responds again,
Thy voice that once was everywhere.

For thou hast fled the crowded street
Where all men run towards Mammon's shrine,
And every heart's desire doth beat
As bids this enemy of thine.

The simple speech grows thick and strange,
The simple habit alters ill,
And with the move of hellward change
Thy feet can tread not with us still.

Thou, scared by rush of turning wheels
And all the clamour of the town,
Hast fled where some sweet streamlet steals
Through autumn woodlands russet brown,

And musing in the sunset glow
With all its gold about thy head,
Dost watch the peaceful water flow
Till all the light of day is dead ;

And surely, in the dreams that flit
Like summer bats about thee there ;
Time with his youth renewed doth sit,
Crowned with all good that dreams can bear.

How should we hope to find thee now,
When, in the strife of rich and poor,
Men's steely hearts no love can bow,
Though Mammon's golden magnet lure

And draw them into gloomy ways
Grown terrible with hate and fear,
And all the evil-working days
Of greed that load the woeful year ?

Thou art not there : in human eyes
The light is quenched that once they bore ;
A generation otherwise
Has thrust thee out and barred the door.

And hearts that love thee still must turn
Far off from ways that groan with men,
To lonely haunts of brake and fern,
The wild bird's home, the lizard's den,

Or by the murmur of the shore
On foam-fringed and untrodden sands,
Or where Spring hides her floral store
In nooks and corners of the land,

Where'er the beauty of the earth
Hides out of sight of man's disgrace,
Thy poets still may bless their birth,
And catch far glimpses of thy face.

Yet such a note is faint and thin
To that clear human note of old,
Thine utmost heaven none may win
Save whom the human touch makes bold.

Come back among us. Dost not hear.
Far off among thy nymphs at play,
The turning of the frost-bound year
Towards renewal of its May ?

A new hope breathes along our streets,
A kindly air that heralds spring,
Warming each withered heart it meets,
Birds in the budding copses sing.

Come, swell these murmurs, faint and far,
Till all men's hearts shall own their sway,
And promise of the morning star
Grows to the fuller light of day.

Methinks I see thee pause and lean
A listening ear against the wind,
And wonder what this voice may mean
With woodland murmurs faintly twined ;

Thy cheek is flushed with sudden hope,
The listening wonder of thine eyes
Orbs round the full prophetic scope
Of dreams begun to realise.

To lift the burden from men's hearts, and give
Large life transcending sorrow to the world—
That were a task, if I were God awhile,
Omnipotence should see to. Being man,
With but one voice to raise amid the roar
Of millions shouting out old battle cries,
Watchwords of strife and triumph songs of greed,
My cry of peace on earth seems like to bear
No more fruition than when made of old
By stronger voices pealing down the night.
Nor could this sense of bitterness have sting
Were men the abject fools of fate : who blames
The dead leaf drifting where the stream may choose?
But that strong men, whose fate is their own will,
With all the high attainment in their scope
That noblest dreams of good can picture forth—
That these should choose a willing slavery
Near proves them fools unworthy to be free :
For what avails it that the world is fair
With visions of the glory that might be,
If men love darkness rather than the light
Of skies grown golden with a promised dawn?

SONNETS.

I.

THE quest of gold. Let out thy soul on hire,
Heed not what baseness may the tenant be
So that it pays its rental—unto thee
Naught seem too vile that helps to thy desire.
When Truth would bankrupt, wear the garb of liar ;
Close up thine ears lest Love should urge her plea ;
Barter thine honour for advantage : see,
So do they all who in this quest aspire.
Then shall the world add all things to thy days,
The love that in the market waits its price,
And wise men seeking such as thou to praise,
Nor shalt thou need to ask for favours twice :
Life with such rust and tarnish covered o'er
Than brightest virtue men esteem far more.

II.

THE quest of lust,—the poison flowers that shine
Over the grave where faithless love lies dead,
Whose most fair-seeming bloom of fiery red
Sucks up its life from wormy roots that twine
Round rotting honour, faith decayed to slime.

Lo, whoso soils his life in such foul bed,
To pluck such growth on its corruption fed,
Shall not be cleansed by penance for all time.
Brief joy with long remorse for afterdoom !

Men whose dead youth belies an uncreased brow
Stretch feverish hands amongst the noisome bloom,
Eagerly plucking.—Watch, wilt join them now ?
See bloody sap gush from each stem they sever,
Love's murdered blood, that stains and burns for ever.

III.

THE quest of power. Who gaineth this must find
The inmost chamber of the House of Lies,
On whose dark threshold love grows faint and dies,
And no life passes but is stricken blind ;
Through foul deceit the lightless pathways wind
To where, watched close by envy's sleepless eyes,
Jewelled with hatreds, fears, and treacheries,
Fools on their brows a joyless crown may bind.
Of thick gloom quarried from the heart of night
This house was built the feet of fools to snare ;
Far down its hidden courts they moan for light,
And all the time the world outside is fair ;
Lords of a lonely heart, a life made bare,
And days grown desolate with love's far flight.

IV.

OH world of doubt and weary questioning,
Of vain regret for life's inconstancy,
Leave the sad wailing of thy bitter cry,
And all thy quests that little comfort bring.
Lo, here to you an end of doubt I sing ;
Nor deem it an unfounded prophecy
That I should see the golden year draw nigh
That bears thy comfort on its hastening wing.
Draw nigh ? Nay, lies it not around thee now,
Bidding thee hasten from the darksome den
Where all the weary race of erring men
Wander unhappy with sin-shadowed brow ?
Only the prison of thy self-reared lies
Holds thee, but while thou wilt, from Paradise.

A SONNET OF LABOUR.

I SAW a sleeping giant bound with chain
Which, had he wakened, would have been but straw ;
Hard hands had he, and in his face an awe
Like a rapt god's of Phidian mould did reign ;
And many puny creatures for their gain
Plundered him while he slept. Methought I saw
That when he moaned or easeless breath did draw
These creatures trembled as with sudden pain.
Thou strong-limbed Labour, king of all the earth,
Oh for a moment when thou shalt awake,
When thy keen eyes from sleep shall win new birth,
And thy strong arms shall every fetter break,
When thy great heart shall know its own true worth,
And thou thy right supremacy shalt take !

LONDON.

MARCH 5, 1892.

HERE then you have your answer, you that thought
To find our London unawakened still,
A sleeping plunder for you, thought to fill
The gorge of private greed and count for naught
The common good. Time unto her has brought
Her glorious hour, her strength of public will
Grown conscious, and a civic soul to thrill
The once dull mass that for your spoil you sought.
Lo, where the alert majestic city stands,
Dreaming her dream of golden days to be,
With shaded eyes beneath her arching hands
Scanning the forward pathway, like a seer
To whom the riven future has made clear
The marvel of some mighty destiny.

THIS is my hope, to kindle ere I die
Some torch which, thrust by passion's hand among
The grainless chaff of damned hypocrisy,
Or into Vice's palace strongly flung,
Shall set the worthless rottenness aflame
With such a burning that not all the power
Of tyrants and their gold-bought priests that hour
Shall keep the retribution from their shame :
A light to tell of hope to each true heart
That sinks beneath the power of lies to-day,
A ray that to the utmost world shall dart
And draw the nations, bringing all their store
Of evil deeds and fraud and love's decay,
To perish in the fire for evermore.

WHO would live on in such a world as this,
Where gilded lies usurp the place of Truth ;
Where Wrong is robed in purple, and men hiss
At scornèd Justice as a thing uncouth ;
Where poison wells of lust are delvèd deep,
And love's clear stream defiled with foulest spite ;
Where selfishness on downy beds doth sleep,
And generous hearts bankrupt their owners quite ;
Where Honesty, a beggar, hugs his rags
Splashed with the mud from Fraud's rich carriage
wheels ;
Where Law, the cunning harlot, daily brags
That crime can buy if gold the bargain seals ;
Who would live on that sorrow did not sway
To strive towards changing this dark night to day ?

WERE it not now that in my inmost heart
A great hope lives to see the coming day,
How gladly would I clasp Death and depart,
And on his wings to silence make my way.
Unheedful of all jarring plans of life,
Free from the turmoil of the schemes men lay,
Battle and tumult still might wage their strife,
Sleep and oblivion over me would stay.
Life's broken music I should hear no more,
Nor know the sickening pang of love grown cold,
Nor brood upon the days that lie before
Full of the tangled cares that life enfold ;
But in the midst of toil by rest unlit
Fall to soft sleep and know no more of it.

CHRISTMAS.

“PEACE and Goodwill!”—Would that the words were
deeds

Wrought in men’s lives, not on their lips alone !

This texture of mere words is scarcely shown
To wrap the world as warmly as it needs
From such chill winter as self-seeking breeds ;

Ay, to the day that surely shall atone

For sorrow and earth’s universal moan

Greater than words must be the force that leads.

“Peace and Goodwill!”—This devil’s mockery

On lips of men who know but strife and hate
Might sound less hollow than hypocrisy

Heard we not hunger crying at our gate ;
Saw we not Mammon lifted up on high

With all the world submitted to his state.

WOE to you rich that eat but will not toil,
Whose hands with plunder of the poor are filled,
Alms-givers in the sight of men, who build
High churches with a portion of your spoil ;
Whose greedy souls not Hell itself could soil
Blacker than now they are. The life-blood spilled
Has cried aloud for vengeance, and has thrilled
The heart of Justice, whom ye shall not foil.
Lo, from the ocean of the people's tears
Riseth the tempest cloud of discontent,
Darkening the sun of your false lives with fears,
Anger and sorrow in its frowning blent ;
Hiding within its midmost heart of gloom
The lightning of the people's wrath, your doom.

“ Inasmuch as ye do it not to one of the least of these My brethren, ye do it not to Me.”

I WALKED with Christ about the city ways,
Where weary faces drifted up and down,
And over all the clamour of the town
We heard the cry that since the ancient days
Has never ceased ; the cry the workers raise,
Whose brows, like His, have sorrow for their crown,
Who bear the world's great burden and its frown,—
Gaunt Christs, whose thorns are not yet hid with bays.
And when He saw rich men, upon whose tongue
His name was frequent, pass nor heed this cry,
“ How true,” He asked me, “ think you these men are,
Whose shallow lips My praise have loudly sung,
Who hear My voice sent to them from afar,
And steel their hearts against it uttered nigh ? ”

MISCELLANEOUS POEMS.

SONNET.

(ON SEEING THREE BUTTERFLIES AT CHARING CROSS ON
A HOT DAY IN SUMMER.)

WHAT do ye at this golden time of year,
Far from your shining meadows filled with flowers,
Where heavy bees drone through the scented hours,
With miles of roaring city round you here?
Why for this maze where skies are never clear,
These glaring streets that not a blossom dowers
With full-blown beauty, leave you thus the bowers
Where daisies at their neighbour blue-bells peer?
Ah, fairy wings, I know you've come this way
To solace me, at Summer's bidding sped;
She knew, dear heart, how I from her must stay:
And since I saw you I have gone about
With all the hot and dusty town shut out,
And dreams of cowslip meadows in my head.

AT HER WINDOW.

THE summer night is waning fast,
The cool breeze round thy window clings,
The beauty of the dark is past,
And dawn another beauty brings ;
Sleep yet a little, love, and see
In dreams that I am near to thee.

The jasmine's starry eyes can peep
Within thy room and see thee there,
Thrice happy flowers to see the sleep
Of one whom God has made so fair ;
Oh sleep, send sweetest dreams to be
The bearers of this kiss from me.

The mated birds begin to wake,
The daisy to unclothe her cup,
And from the dewy hawthorn brake
Faint chirpings to the skies go up ;
Oh Love, must I contented be
If but in dreams thou lovest me ?

The golden light has grown more clear
And glows upon thy window now,
Would I were but the sunbeam, dear,
To enter thus and kiss thy brow ;
Yet soon thou wilt awake ; and see
Thy dreams become reality.

Lo, from the sun a level ray
Shoots brightly, and the glad earth sings,
To her has come another day
Borne on her sun-love's golden wings ;
Awake, awake, my love, and be
Sunrise and happiness to me.

A SPRING IDYLL.

COME, my love, with me away,
We will joy ourselves to-day.
From my window here I see
How the earth in laughing glee
Glistens in the sportive beam
And the fresh spring leaflets gleam.
Come, we will not linger here,
But where sunbeams warm and clear
Send soft beauty from above
We will pass the day with Love,
Where the speckled shadows fall
From the leafy beeches tall,
And the cool south wind doth wave
Over hoary winter's grave.
For the merry maiden Spring
With a lavish hand doth fling
Beauty o'er the earth to-day,
We with her will joyful play.
Over level fields we'll roam
Where the skylark has its home,
And the trembling air doth quiver
Like a sunbeam on the river.

Where the blue-bell hangs its head
Near a yellow primrose bed,
Where the wood's recesses gleam
With the sparkling of a stream,
On whose banks we will recline,
While sweet may and eglantine
Pour their odours on the air,
We will wander free from care.
Where the mellow light doth shake
On the silver waterbreak,
There we'll drown all doleful sorrow
And sweet joy from Nature borrow.

Where the stream doth hidden glide
Under bushes, we will hide
From the hot glare of the day ;
There we'll watch the softened ray
Glisten through the quickened bushes,
And, as on the water rushes,
Gleam upon each dappled pool
In the soft and shady cool.
Cowslips, buttercups, and daisies,
Blooming where a flowery maze is,
Shall below our footsteps rise,
While above us in the skies
Sweet birds sing in joy, and we
Happy in our love shall be.

Thus we'll chase the sunny hours
Through the day's retreating bowers ;

And we'll gather flowers fair,
Which within their grassy lair
Light, like soft stars of the earth,
Every glade with their sweet mirth.
And when evening shades shall fall,
When the lark shall sweetly call
From his watch-tower in the sky,
And the shading light shall lie
On the fields with fading glow
Where the springing corn doth grow,
And the winds forget to blow
Till the golden light shall roll
Like a dream from out the soul,
And the star's serener ray
Comfort us for loss of day,
We will wander homewards then
Through the streamlet-threaded glen,
Past the hoar wood, in whose shades
Spirits of the starlit glades
Glide amongst the darkened trees,
With such music as the breeze
Wakens on a sultry day
In this merry month of May ;
We will talk with mystic ghosts,
Sweet-voiced in the rustling hosts
Of the leaves, and spirits fair
That to welcome May appear.
Come, no longer will we wait,
Earth is joyful and elate ;
Come, my love, with me away,
We will joy ourselves to-day.

TO YOU, MY BROTHER.

I WOULD not wish for thee a place
With riches over-fraught,
Beyond her own sweet modest grace
The violet hath naught ;
Rich in thyself, and gold no whit
Can add, nor fill the lack of it.

The perfect wealth beyond decay
Be thine—a soul to see
The glory that outshines the day
In meanest things that be,
The light that breaks, for who hath eyes,
From clods of earth and starry skies.

Be thine the vision clear to go
Beyond all veils that blind,
Through state and wealth, through vice and woe
To see the Man behind ;
And thine the human right to give
A brother's hand to all that live.

The poor are they who stand afar
From that divine caress
Of love that links the loftiest star
With outcast lowliness,
Nor know the blessed mood that springs
From commune with all living things.

A BRIDAL.

FAR-SPREADING branches hung with fruited stars,
Are canopy for us to-night,
And dead is every cursèd straint that bars
Our love from its delight.

Kiss me, my love, as though death came with morn,
And life had no more space to go ;
Let us forget all past, and hold in scorn
The memory of woe.

Heed not the dew that gathers in thine hair,
Life hath a million tears in store,
And every day that passeth us will bear
To us one sorrow more.

Lo, how thine heart leaps underneath my touch,
With hurried breath that swells and falls ;
We were not born with madness overmuch
To lose the hour that calls.

We two within the circle of this night
Are shut from all the world beside,
And life's regretful sadness turns to light
Clasped in thine arms, my bride.

IN PRAISE OF LOAFING.

I'd rather lie on my back in the sun
And loaf through the summer hours,
And watch, half-dreaming, the shine of the bees
That drone round the nodding flowers,
Than be the wisest man in the world,
Or boast of an emperor's powers.

Wise men can tell what it is that makes
The light of the sun to shine,
And write great books about this and that,
But what is their lore to mine?
For better than all they know is to bask
All day in his beams divine.

Give me a meadow in full-blown June,
Or to lie on a clear stream's edge,
Where feathery meadow-sweet plays with the light,
And forget-me-nots hide in the sedge,
And I steal that kiss from the breeze again
That it stole from the sweet-briar hedge ;

And let me sing for joy of my life,
Of the sun that warms me through,
For joy of the summer, of waving leaves,
And scents that the soft winds strew,
For joy of the daisy here at my feet,
And the lark away in the blue !

Oh to be full of the joy of it all !
With face upturned to the glow,
To float on the tide of its great glad life,
And throb as its pulses go,
As a boat on the moving sea exults
With the swell of the wave below !

And fools who shut themselves up with books,
And lumber their heads with the dry
Old facts about things that they never enjoy,
Who tabulate life—and die,
Who out of their studies can weigh the sun,
Know less of it far than I.

LOVE SONNETS.

I.

I do not blame thee, Love, that thou hast set
My heart upon a goal I ne'er can reach,
Nor would I ask oblivion to teach
The placid peace that comes when we forget ;
Nay, though my cheeks with tearful dew are wet,
And broken as a March day is my speech,
I will not, e'en in dreams, thine art impeach,
But rather joy that thou and I have met.
Leave me not, Love. She whom I love is fair ;
And I am but a leaf upon the tree
Nigh to her nest, and see her mated there ;
And yet, O Love, it is deep joy to me
That thou hast filled her life with thy sweet care,
Nor would I cease to love, though hopelessly.

II.

A WAVE that feels the white moon's lifting power ;
The star of dawn that vainly loves the day,
And, ere it finds it, fades in death away ;
A soaring eagle at the noontide hour
Striving towards the sun ; the summer flower
That loves the nightingale ; with Love's new wine
A poet filled who feels some thought divine
And strives to grasp it for his fame's great dower ;
These never can attain to their desire,
Nor be with perfect fulness satisfied ;
And may not I, who goddesswards aspire,
Strive, vain as they, to soar so far above ?
Failure or gain, so help me, mighty Love,
I will not doubt my wings till I have tried.

III.

As earth and moon pursue their circling way,
Each to the other seemeth fair and bright,
Clothed in the reflex of the sun's great light ;
Yet each knows well that darkness is its trait.
Even so, perchance, although in me there may
Be nothing that is worthy of her sight,
Yet by the glow of Love, my sun, bedight,
She may see beauty in the borrowed ray.
Oh that we twain for ever might pursue
Our course together like a double sphere,
And, passing Time, in that glad, golden year,
Such glory of great happiness should view,
That he would leave us to our bliss, and rue
With his keen sickle our twinned joy to shear.

IV.

WHEN my life's night was very sad and lone
Thou, my fair dawn, hast brought the light to me,
And shown me hope, for, since the world holds thee,
Good things and lovely are not wholly flown ;
Nor is there need for evermore to moan,
Though some fair dreams in sorrow buried be,
What need of weeping for the stars' dead glee ?
The sun for them doth millionfold atone.
Thy looks have made a new life stir in me ;
I hold Love's sea-shell promises to hear
The murmur of their music in mine ear,
And lo, they tell me secrets. Ah ! shall he
Who hears such whispers speak them ? Nay, I fear
That thou canst read my secret mystery.

V.

WE had not spoken of our love at all,
Only with joy of mutual company,
What time we roamed beside the sunlit sea,
We felt that passion had made each his thrall ;
We knew, but spoke it not, that our deep bliss
Was not alone the glory of the day ;
Each knew that had the other been away
Neither alone had felt such happiness.
But when we sat, at quiet evening's hour,
Hearing the song of that day's great delight
Made loud by memory's past-recalling power,
Love, like an undertone that swells in might,
Took up the strain and spoke, and then we knew
What was our source of joy the whole day through.

VI.

As when upon the weary, waiting earth,
Spring, long-expected, rests her heavenly wings,
One long delightful song of rapture rings
From all the world at beauty's bright new birth ;
So would I sing aloud my triumph lay,
And make high heaven listen to my joy,
The clouds of night the dawning doth destroy,
And Love fulfilled doth rule the happy day.
Oh hide you, storied lovers of the past,
Get you to cold oblivion and sleep !
Your highest joy have I o'ertopped at last,
And you your well-earned restfulness may reap ;
For no man e'er as I held love so vast,
Or drew the breath of happiness so deep.

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VII.

SOME choose them lovers for a title's sake,
And many are there who do wed for gold,
And mostly they who fall in this mistake
Weep bitterly before their days are old ;
I'd buy thee not with lordly name, I ween,
Nor offer wealth my passion's depth to prove,
If thou dost wish for title, be my queen,
And if for wealth, take all I have, my love.
Love that is bought is lust, and I would know
The Love that springeth freely from true hearts,
Whose trust is perfect, and, as time doth grow,
Whose joy ne'er palls, nor beauty e'er departs ;
Free love, which after many years will hold
Its first delight, nor ever can grow cold.

VIII.

As some carved god sits brooding on one thought,
With one fixed smile, defying wasteful Time,
Lost in a marble dream of some sublime,
Great hopeful deed his hands have nobly wrought ;
The years around his moveless feet have brought
The fleeting tides of men that ever climb
In lapsed succession round his godhead's prime,
Whose eyes with one deep changeless fate are fraught :
So would I take the touching of thy lips,
And ere the glory faded from my face
Fix it that never sorrow might eclipse,
But take the sudden stamp of marbled grace ;
So might I brood for ever, changeless stone,
On the great glory that my lips had known.

IX.

WHEN I am gone and busy tongues of spite
Beset thine ear to steal thine heart from me,
Love, heed them not, whate'er their tale may be,
But when thou hear'st them think of Love's great
might.

Yea, as a flower when clouds close out the light,
That shuts itself against the day's rough mood,
And on its own heart's sweetest self doth brood,
Despising thus the winds that would affright ;
So do thou turn thine hearing from their lies,
And to thine own heart listen, as it tells
Of all the love that in our being swells,
And Hope shall lead thy feet o'er flower-strewn ways,
Until we twain shall reach the sweet surprise
Of joy for us within the coming days.

X.

HERE will I balance up my joy and woe,
The sweet and bitter mingled in my life ;
Into one scale my every grief I'll throw,
The envy of small souls with slander rife,
The weariness of hope unsatisfied,
The tears that I have shed for dear friends dead,
The undeservèd scorn, my worth denied,
The anguish of injustice round me shed,
The wrongs of earth that make Hell's fiends elate,
Right dowered with woe, evil with blessings fraught,
But when 'gainst these I put thy love's great weight
Then do I deem my sorrows all but naught ;
While thou dost love, my griefs will seem to me
A raindrop weighed against the boundless sea.

XI.

As when the moon behind thick clouds doth fall,
And to the roar of storms the sea replies,
When shuddering stars in terror veil their eyes,
And raven-wingèd blackness covers all,
Thunder to thunder 'midst the hills doth call,
And lightning with the deep-toned message flies,
While 'mid the tumult's glorious fury rise
Loud roaring winds and sounds majestic :
So great a power thy love would give to me
Were fate to strive to set our souls atwain,
That though his rage like this wild storm should be,
We two like stars above the clouds would reign,
And let the world so strong and love-bond see
That even Fate should prove his power in vain.

XII.

OH love, my love, when o'er our love at last
 Death draws the veil of consciousless repose,
 And hearts shall rest in quiet that, God knows,
Have been tired out before their time was past,
Passion shall tempt not, nor shall Love beseech
 Our souls to taste the joy of his delight,
 Nor evermore shall clinging lips unite,
Nor youth toward Love's perfect fulness reach.
Kiss me, oh love ! the years bring nigh the close,
 Fill up the brimming juice of life and drink,
The summer passes, and the proudest rose
 Scarce sees its fulness ere its petals sink ;
Let not the end bring visions of dead hours
Whose joys unplucked might surely have been ours.

The Gresham Press,

UNWIN BROTHERS,

CHILWORTH AND LONDON.

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